

LETTER
FROM THE
HON. JOSEPH HOLT,
UPON THE
Policy of the General Government,
THE
PENDING REVOLUTION,
ITS OBJECTS,
ITS PROBABLE RESULTS IF SUCCESSFUL,
AND THE
DUTY OF KENTUCKY IN THE CRISIS.

SECOND EDITION.

WASHINGTON:
HENRY POLKINHORN, PRINTER.
1861.

LETTER

FROM THE

HON. JOSEPH HOLT,

UPON THE

Policy of the General Government,

THE

PENDING REVOLUTION,

ITS OBJECTS,

ITS PROBABLE RESULTS IF SUCCESSFUL,

AND THE

DUTY OF KENTUCKY IN THE CRISIS.

WASHINGTON:
HENRY POLKINHORN, PRINTER.
1861.

LETTER OF HON. JOSEPH HOLT.

We have before us, in pamphlet form, from the press of Mr. Henry Polkinhorn, (where copies can be had,) the admirable Letter of the Hon. JOSEPH HOLT, of Kentucky, (late Secretary of War,) upon the policy of the General Government, the pending Revolution, its objects, its probable results if successful, and the duty of Kentucky in the crisis. As a document free from passion, of great calmness of reasoning, and of elevated patriotism, it should be read, pondered, and preserved, as a memorial not only of the duty of the people of Kentucky, but of the whole people of our once happy Union.—*National Intelligencer.*

WASHINGTON, May 31, 1861.

J. F. SPEED, Esq.:

My Dear Sir:—The recent overwhelming vote in favor of the Union in Kentucky has afforded unspeakable gratification to all true men throughout the country. This vote indicates that the people of that gallant State have been neither seduced by the arts nor terrified by the menaces of the revolutionists in their midst, and that it is their fixed purpose to remain faithful to a Government which, for nearly seventy years, has remained faithful to them. Still it cannot be denied that there is in the bosom of that State a band of agitators, who, though few in number, are yet powerful from the public confidence they have enjoyed, and who have been, and doubtless will continue to be, unceasing in their endeavors to force Kentucky to unite her fortunes with those of the rebel Confederacy of the South. In view of this and of the well known fact that several of the seceded States have by fraud and violence been driven to occupy their present false and fatal position, I cannot, even with the encouragement of her late vote before me, look upon the political future of our native State without a painful solicitude. Never have the safety and honor of her people required the exercise of so much vigilance and of so much courage on their part. If true to themselves, the stars and stripes, which, like angels' wings, have so long guarded their homes from every oppression, will still be theirs; but if, chasing the dreams of other men's ambition, they shall prove false, the blackness of darkness can but faintly depict the doom that awaits them. The Legislature, it seems, has determined by resolution that the State, pending the present unhappy war, shall occupy neutral ground. I must say, in all frankness, and without designing to reflect upon the course or sentiments of any, that, in this struggle for the existence of our Government, I can neither practice, nor profess, nor feel neutrality. I would as soon think of being neutral in a contest between an officer of justice and an incendiary arrested in the attempt to fire the dwelling over my head; for the Government, whose overthrow is sought, is for me the shelter not only of home, kindred, and friends, but of every earthly blessing which I can

hope to enjoy on this side of the grave. If, however, from a natural horror of fratricidal strife, or from her intimate social and business relations with the South, Kentucky shall determine to maintain the neutral attitude assumed for her by her Legislature, her position will still be an honorable one, though falling far short of that full measure of loyalty which her history has so constantly illustrated. Her executive, ignoring, as I am happy to believe, alike the popular and legislative sentiment of the State, has, by proclamation, forbidden the government of the United States from marching troops across her territory. This is, in no sense, a neutral step, but one of aggressive hostility. The troops of the Federal Government have as clear a constitutional right to pass over the soil of Kentucky as they have to march along the streets of Washington, and could this prohibition be effective, it would not only be a violation of the fundamental law, but would, in all its tendencies, be directly in advancement of the revolution, and might, in an emergency easily imagined, compromise the highest national interests. I was rejoiced that the Legislature so promptly refused to endorse this proclamation as expressive of the true policy of the State. But I turn away from even this to the ballot-box, and find an abounding consolation in the conviction it inspires, that the popular heart of Kentucky, in its devotion to the Union, is far in advance alike of legislative resolve and of executive proclamation.

But as it is well understood that the late popular demonstration has rather scotched than killed rebellion in Kentucky, I propose inquiring, as briefly as practicable, whether, in the recent action or present declared policy of the Administration, or in the history of the pending revolution, or in the objects it seeks to accomplish, or in the results which must follow from it, if successful, there can be discovered any reasons why that State should sever the ties that unite her with a Confederacy in whose councils and upon whose battle-fields she has won so much fame, and under whose protection she has enjoyed so much prosperity.

For more than a month after the inauguration of President Lincoln the manifestations seemed unequivocal that his Administration would seek a peaceful solution of our unhappy political troubles, and would look to time and amendments to the Federal Constitution, adopted in accordance with its provisions, to bring back the revolted States to their allegiance.

So marked was the effect of these manifestations in tranquilizing the Border States and reassuring their loyalty, that the conspirators who had set this revolution on foot took the alarm. While affecting to despise these States as not sufficiently intensified in their devotion to African servitude, they knew they could never succeed in their treasonable enterprise without their support. Hence it was resolved to precipitate a collision of arms with the Federal authorities, in the hope that, under the panic and exasperation incident to the commencement of a civil war, the Border States, following the natural bent of their sympathies, would array themselves against the Government. Fort Sumter, occupied by a feeble garrison, and girdled by powerful if not impregnable batteries, afforded convenient means for accomplishing their purpose, and for testing also their favorite theory that blood was needed to cement the new Confederacy. Its provisions were exhausted, and the request made by the President in the interests of peace and humanity, for the privilege of replenishing its stores, had been refused. The Confederate authorities were aware—for so the gallant commander of the fort had declared to them—that in two days a capitulation from starvation must take place. A peaceful surrender, however, would not have subserved their aims. They sought the clash of arms and the effusion of blood as an instrumentality for impressing the Border States, and they sought the humiliation of the Government and the dishonor of its flag as a means of giving prestige to their own cause. The result is known. Without the slightest provocation a heavy cannonade was opened upon the fort, and borne by its helpless garrison for hours without reply, and when, in the progress of the bombardment, the fortification became wrapped in flames, the besieging batteries in violation of the usages of civilized warfare, instead of relaxing or suspending, redoubled their fires. A more wanton or wicked war was never commenced on any Government whose history has been written. Contemporary with and following the fall of Sumter, the siege of Fort Pickens was and still is actively pressed; the property of the United States Government continued to be seized wherever found, and its troops by fraud or force, captured in the State of Texas in violation of a solemn compact with its authorities that they should be permitted to embark without molestation. This was the requital which the

lone star State made to brave men who, through long years of peril and privation, had guarded its frontiers against the incursions of the savages. In the midst of the most active and extended warlike preparations in the South, the announcement was made by the Secretary of War of the seceded States, and echoed with taunts and insolent bravadoes by the Southern press, that Washington City was to be invaded and captured, and that the flag of the Confederate States would soon float over the dome of its Capitol. Soon thereafter there followed an invitation to all the world—embracing necessarily the outcasts and desperadoes of every sea—to accept letters of marque and reprisal, to prey upon the rich and unprotected commerce of the United States.

In view of these events and threatenings, what was the duty of the Chief Magistrate of the Republic? He might have taken counsel of revolutionists and trembled under their menaces; he might, upon the fall of Sumter, have directed that Fort Pickens should be surrendered without firing a gun in its defence, and proceeding yet further, and meeting fully the requirements of the “let-us-alone” policy insisted on in the South, he might have ordered that the stars and stripes should be laid in the dust in the presence of every bit of rebel bunting that might appear. But he did none of these things, nor could he have done them without forgetting his oath and betraying the most sublime trust that has ever been confided to the hands of man. With a heroic fidelity to his constitutional obligations, and feeling justly that these obligations charged him with the protection of the Republic and its Capital against the assaults alike of foreign and domestic enemies, he threw himself on the loyalty of the country for support in the struggle upon which he was about to enter, and nobly has that appeal been responded to. States containing an aggregate population of nineteen millions have answered to the appeal as with the voice of one man, offering soldiers without number, and treasure without limitation, for the service of the Government. In these States, fifteen hundred thousand freemen cast their votes in favor of candidates supporting the rights of the South, at the last Presidential election, and yet everywhere, alike in popular assemblies and upon the tented field, this million and a half of voters are found yielding to none in the zeal with which they rally to their country’s flag. They are not less

the friends of the South than before ; but they realize that the question now presented is not one of administrative policy, nor of the claims of the North, South, East, or the West ; but is, simply, whether nineteen millions of people shall tamely and ignobly permit five or six millions to overthrow and destroy institutions which are the common property, and have been the common blessing and glory of all. The great thoroughfares of the North, the East, and the West, are luminous with the banners and glistening with the bayonets of citizen soldiers marching to the Capital, or to other points of rendezvous ; but they come in no hostile spirit to the South. If called to press her soil, they will not ruffle a flower of her gardens, nor a blade of grass of her fields in unkindness. No excesses will mark the footsteps of the armies of the Republic ; no institutions of the State will be invaded or tampered with, no rights of persons or property will be violated. The known purposes of the Administration, and the high character of the troops employed, alike guarantee the truthfulness of this statement. When an insurrection was apprehended a few weeks since in Maryland, the Massachusetts regiment at once offered their services to suppress it. These volunteers have been denounced by the press of the South as "knaves and vagrants," "the dregs and offscourings of the populace," who would "rather filch a handkerchief than fight an enemy in manly combat ;" yet we know, here, that their discipline and bearing are most admirable, and, I presume, it may be safely affirmed that a larger amount of social position, culture, fortune, and elevation of character, has never been found in so large an army in any age or country. If they go to the South, it will be as friends and protectors, to relieve the Union sentiment of the seceded States from the cruel domination by which it is oppressed and silenced ; to unfurl the stars and stripes in the midst of those who long to look upon them, and to restore the flag that bears them to the forts and arsenals from which disloyal hands have torn it. Their mission will be one of peace, unless wicked and blood-thirsty men shall unsheathe the sword across their path-way.

It is in vain for the revolutionists to exclaim that this is "subjugation." It is so, precisely in the sense in which you and I and all law-abiding citizens are subjugated. The people of the South are our brethren, and

while we obey the laws enacted by our joint authority, and keep a compact to which we are all parties, we only ask that they shall be required to do the same. We believe that their safety demands this; we know that ours does. We impose no burden which we ourselves do not bear; we claim no privilege or blessing which our brethren of the South shall not equally share. Their country is our country, and ours is theirs; and that unity both of country and government which the providence of God and the compacts of men have created, we could not ourselves, without self-immolation, destroy, nor can we permit it to be destroyed by others.

Equally vain is it for them to declare that they only wish "to be let alone," and that, in establishing the independence of the seceded States, they do those which remain in the old confederacy no harm. The free States, if allowed the opportunity of doing so, will undoubtedly concede every guarantee needed to afford complete protection to the institutions of the South, and to furnish assurances of her perfect equality in the Union; but all such guarantees and assurances are now openly spurned, and the only Southern right now insisted on is that of dismembering the republic. It is perfectly certain that in the attempted exercise of this right neither States nor statesmen will be "let alone." Should a ruffian meet me in the streets, and seek with his axe to hew an arm and a leg from my body, I would not the less resist him because, as a dishonored and helpless trunk, I might perchance survive the mutilation. It is easy to perceive what fatal results to the old confederacy would follow should the blow now struck at its integrity ultimately triumph. We can well understand what degradation it would bring to it abroad and what weakness at home; what exhaustion from incessant wars and standing armies, and from the erection of fortifications along the thousands of miles of new frontier; what embarrassments to commerce from having its natural channels encumbered or cut off; what elements of disintegration and revolution would be introduced from the pernicious example; and, above all, what humiliation would cover the whole American people for having failed in their great mission to demonstrate before the world the capacity of our race for self-government.

While a far more fearful responsibility has fallen upon President Lincoln than upon any of his predecessors, it must be admitted that he has

met it with promptitude and fearlessness. Cicero, in one of his orations against Catiline, speaking of the credit due himself for having suppressed the conspiracy of that arch-traitor, said, "if the glory of him who founded Rome was great, how much greater should be that of him who had saved it from overthrow after it had grown to be the mistress of the world?" So it may be said of the glory of that statesman or chieftain who shall snatch from the vortex of revolution this republic, now that it has expanded from ocean to ocean, has become the admiration of the world, and has rendered the fountains of the lives of thirty millions of people fountains of happiness.

The vigorous measures adopted for the safety of Washington and the Government itself may seem open to criticism, in some of their details, to those who have yet to learn that not only has war, like peace, its laws, but that it has also its privileges and its duties. Whatever of severity, or even of irregularity, may have arisen, will find its justification in the pressure of the terrible necessity under which the Administration has been called to act. When a man feels the poignard of the destroyer at his bosom, he is not likely to consult the law books as to the mode or measure of his rights of self-defense. What is true of individuals is in this respect equally true of governments. The man who thinks he has become disloyal because of what the Administration has done, will probably discover, after a closer self-examination, that he was disloyal before. But for what has been done, Washington might ere this have been a smouldering heap of ruins.

They have noted the course of public affairs to little advantage who suppose that the election of Mr. Lincoln was the real ground of the revolutionary outbreak that has occurred. The roots of the revolution may be traced back for more than a quarter of a century, and an unholy lust for power is the soil out of which it sprang. A prominent member of the band of agitators declared in one of his speeches at Charleston, last November or December, that they had been occupied for thirty years in the work of severing South Carolina from the Union. When General Jackson crushed nullification, he said it would revive again under the form of the slavery agitation: and we have lived to see his prediction verified. Indeed that agitation, during the last fifteen or twenty years,

has been almost the entire stock in trade of Southern politicians. The Southern people, known to be as generous in their impulses as they are chivalric, were not wrought into a frenzy of passion by the intemperate words of a few fanatical abolitionists ; for these words, if left to themselves, would have fallen to the ground as pebbles into the sea, and would have been heard of no more. But it was the echo of these words, repeated with exaggerations for the thousandth time by Southern politicians, in the halls of Congress, and in the deliberative and popular assemblies, and through the press of the South, that produced the exasperation that has proved so potent a lever in the hands of the conspirators. The cloud was fully charged, and the juggling revolutionists who held the wires and could at will direct its lightnings, appeared at Charleston, broke up the Democratic Convention assembled to nominate a candidate for the Presidency, and thus secured the election of Mr. Lincoln. Having thus rendered this certain, they at once set to work to bring the popular mind of the South to the point of determining in advance, that the election of a Republican President would be, *per se*, cause for a dissolution of the Union. They were but too successful, and to this result the inaction and indecision of the Border States deplorably contributed. When the election of Mr. Lincoln was announced, there was rejoicing in the streets of Charleston, and doubtless at other points in the South ; for it was believed by the conspirators that they had reached a tide in the current of their machinations which would bear them on to victory. The drama of secession was now open, and State after State rapidly rushed out of the Union, and their members withdrew from Congress. The revolution was pressed on in this hot haste in order that no time should be allowed for reaction in the Northern mind, or for any adjustment of the slavery issues by the action of Congress or of the State Legislatures. Had the Southern members continued in their seats, a satisfactory compromise would, no doubt, have been arranged and passed before the adjournment of Congress. As it was, after their retirement, and after Congress had become Republican, an amendment to the Constitution was adopted by a two-thirds vote, declaring that Congress should never interfere with slavery in the States, and declaring, further, that this amendment should be irrevocable. Thus was falsified the

clamor so long and so insidiously rung in the ears of the Southern people, that the abolition of slavery in the States was the ultimate aim of the Republican party. But even this amendment, and all others which may be needed to furnish the guarantees demanded are now defeated by the secession of eleven States, which, claiming to be out of the Union will refuse to vote upon, and in effect will vote against, any proposals to modify the Federal Constitution. There are now thirty-four States in the confederacy, three-fourths of which—being twenty-six—must concur in the adoption of any amendment before it can become a part of the Constitution ; but the secess on of eleven States leaves but twenty-three whose vote can possibly be secured, which is less than the constitutional number.

Thus we have the extraordinary and discreditable spectacle of a revolution made by certain States professedly on the ground that guarantees for the safety of their institutions are denied them, and at the same time instead of co-operating with their sister States in obtaining these guarantees, they designedly assume a hostile attitude, and thereby render it constitutionally impossible to secure them. This profound dissimulation shows that it was not the safety of the South but its severance from the confederacy which was sought from the beginning. Contemporary with, and in some instances preceding these acts of secession, the greatest outrages were committed upon the Government of the United States by the States engaged in them. Its forts, arsenals, arms, barracks, custom-houses, post-offices, moneys, and indeed every species of property within the limits of these States, were seized and appropriated, down to the very hospital stores for the sick soldiers. More than half a million of dollars was plundered from the mint at New Orleans. United States vessels were received from the defiled hands of their officers in command, and, as if in the hope of consecrating official treachery as one of the public virtues of the age, the surrender of an entire military department by a general, to the keeping of whose honor it had been confided, was deemed worthy of the commendation and thanks of the conventions of several States. All these lawless proceedings were well understood to have been prompted and directed by men occupying seats in the Capitol, some of whom were frank enough to declare that they could not and would

not, though in a minority, live under a Government which they could not control. In this declaration is found the key which unlocks the whole of the complicated machinery of this revolution. The profligate ambition of public men, in all ages and lands, has been the rock on which republics have been split. Such men have arisen in our midst—men who, because unable permanently to grasp the helm of the ship, are willing to destroy it in the hope to command some one of the rafts that may float away from the wreck. The effect would be to degrade us to a level with the military bandits of Mexico and South America, who, when beaten at an election, fly to arms, and seek to master by the sword what they have been unable to control by the ballot-box.

The atrocious acts enumerated were acts of war, and might all have been treated as such by the late administration; but the President patriotically cultivated peace—how anxiously, and how patiently, the country well knows. While, however, the revolutionary leaders greeted him with all bails to his face, they did not the less diligently continue to whet their swords behind his back. Immense military preparations were made, so that when the moment for striking at the Government of the United States arrived, the revolutionary States leaped into the contest clad in full armor.

As if nothing should be wanting to darken this page of history, the seceded States have already entered upon the work of confiscating the debts due from their citizens to the North and Northwest. The millions thus gained will doubtless prove a pleasant substitute for those guarantees now so scornfully rejected. To these confiscations will probably succeed soon those of lands and negroes owned by the citizens of loyal States; and, indeed, the apprehension of this step is already sadly disturbing the fidelity of non-resident proprietors. Fortunately, however, infirmity of faith, springing from such a cause, is not likely to be contagious. The war thus begun is being prosecuted by the Confederate States in a temper as fierce and unsparing as that which characterises conflicts between the most hostile nations. Letters of marque and reprisal are being granted to all who seek them, so that our coasts will soon swarm with these piratical cruisers, as the President has properly denounced them. Every buccaneer who desires to rob American commerce upon

the ocean, can, for the asking, obtain a warrant to do so in the name of the new republic. To crown all, large bodies of Indians have been mustered into the service of the revolutionary States, and are now conspicuous in the ranks of the Southern army. A leading North Carolina journal, noting their stalwart frames and unerring markmanship, observes, with an exultation positively fiendish, that they are armed, not only with the rifle, but also with the *scalping knife and tomahawk*.

Is Kentucky willing to link her name in history with the excesses and crimes which have sullied this revolution at every step of its progress? Can she soil her pure hands with its booty? She possesses the noblest heritage that God has granted to his children; is she prepared to barter it away for that miserable mess of pottage, which the gratification of the unholy ambition of her public men would bring to her lips? Can she, without laying her face in the dust for very shame, become a participant in the spoliation of the commerce of her neighbors and friends, by contributing her star, hitherto so stainless in its glory, to light the corsair on his way? Has the war-whoop, which used to startle the sleep of our frontiers, so died away in her ears that she is willing to take the red-handed savage to her bosom as the champion of her rights and the representative of her spirit? Must she not first forget her own heroic sons who perished, butchered and scalped, upon the disastrous field of Raisin?

The object of the revolution, as avowed by all who are pressing it forward, is the permanent dismemberment of the Confederacy. The dream of reconstruction—used during the last winter as a lure to draw the hesitating or the hopeful into the movement—has been formally abandoned. If Kentucky separates herself from the Union, it must be upon the basis that the separation is to be final and eternal. Is there aught in the organization or administration of the Government of the United States to justify, on her part, an act so solemn and so perilous? Could the wisest of her lawyers, if called upon, find material for an indictment in any or in all the pages of the history of the Republic? Could the most leprous-lipped of its calumniators point to a single State or Territory or community or citizen that it has wronged or oppressed? It would be impossible. So far as the slave States are concerned, their protection has been complete, and if it has not been, it has been the fault of their

statesmen, who have had the control of the government since its foundation.

The census returns show that during the year 1860 the Fugitive Slave Law was executed more faithfully and successfully than it had been during the preceding ten years. Since the installation of President Lincoln not a case has arisen in which the fugitive has not been returned, and that, too, without any opposition from the people. Indeed, the fidelity with which it was understood to be the policy of the present Administration to enforce the provisions of this law has caused a perfect panic among the runaway slaves in the free States, and they have been escaping in multitudes to Canada, unpursued and unreclaimed by their masters. Is there found in this reason for a dissolution of the Union ?

That the slave States are not recognized as equals in the Confederacy, has, for several years, been the cry of demagogues and conspirators. But what is the truth ? Not only according to the theory, but the actual practice of the Government, the slave States have ever been, and still are, in all respects, the peers of the free. Of the fourteen Presidents who have been elected, seven were citizens of slave States, and of the seven remaining, three represented Southern principles, and received the votes of the Southern people ; so that in our whole history but four Presidents have been chosen who can be claimed as the special champions of the policy and principles of the free States, and even these so only in a modified sense. Does this look as if the South had ever been deprived of her equal share of the honors and powers of the Government ? The Supreme Court has decided that the citizens of the slave States can, at will, take their slaves into all the Territories of the United States ; and this decision, which has never been resisted or interfered with in a single case, is the law of the land, and the whole power of the Government is pledged to enforce it. That it will be loyally enforced by the present Administration, I entertain no doubt. A Republican Congress, at the late session, organized three new Territories, and in the organic law of neither was there introduced, or attempted to be introduced, the slightest restriction upon the rights of the Southern emigrant to bring his slaves with him. At this moment, therefore—and I state it without qualification—there is not a Territory belonging to the United States into

which the Southern people may not introduce their slaves at pleasure, and enjoy there complete protection. Kentucky should consider this great and undeniable fact, before which all the frothy rant of demagogues and disunionists must disappear as a bank of fog before the wind. But were it otherwise, and did a defect exist in our organic law or in the practical administration of the Government in reference to the rights of Southern slaveholders in the Territories, still the question would be a mere abstraction, since the laws of climate forbid the establishment of slavery in such latitudes; and to destroy such institutions as ours for such a cause, instead of patiently trying to remove it, would be little short of national insanity. It would be to burn the house down over our heads merely because there is a leak in the roof; to scuttle the ship in mid-ocean merely because there is a difference of opinion among the crew as to the point of the compass to which the vessel should be steered; it would be, in fact, to apply the knife to the throat instead of to the cancer of the patient.

But what remains? Though, say the disunionists, the Fugitive Slave Law is honestly enforced, and though, under the shelter of the Supreme Court, we can take our slaves into the Territories, yet, the Northern people will persist in discussing the institution of slavery, and therefore we will break up the Government. It is true that slavery has been very intemperately discussed in the North, and it is equally true that until we have an Asiatic despotism, crushing out all freedom of speech and of the press, this discussion will probably continue. In this age and country all institutions, human and divine, are discussed, and so they ought to be; and all that cannot bear discussion must go to the wall, where they ought to go. It is not pretended, however, that the discussion of slavery, which has been continued in our country for more than forty years, has in any manner disturbed or weakened the foundations of the institution. On the contrary, we learn from the press of the seceded States that their slaves were never more tranquil or obedient. There are zealots—happily few in number—both North and South, whose language upon this question is alike extravagant and alike deserving our condemnation. Those who assert that slavery should be extirpated by the sword, and those who maintain that the great mission of the white man upon earth is to en-

slave the black, are not far apart in the folly and atrocity of their sentiments.

Before proceeding further, Kentucky should measure well the depth of the gulf she is approaching, and look well to the feet of her guides. Before forsaking a Union in which her people have enjoyed such uninterrupted and such boundless prosperity, she should ask herself, not once, but many times, *why do I go, and where am I going?* In view of what has been said, it would be difficult to answer the first branch of the inquiry, but the answer to the second part is patent to all, as are the consequences which would follow the movement. In giving her great material and moral resources to the support of the Southern Confederacy, Kentucky might prolong the desolating struggle that rebellious States are making to overthrow a Government which they have only known in its blessings, but the triumph of the Government would nevertheless be certain in the end. She would abandon a Government strong and able to protect her, for one that is weak, and that contains, in the very elements of its life, the seeds of distraction, and early dissolution. She would adopt, as the law of her existence, the right of secession—a right which has no foundation in jurisprudence, or logic, or in our political history; which Madison, the father of the Federal Constitution, denounced; which has been denounced by most of the States and prominent statesmen now insisting upon its exercise; which, in introducing a principle of indefinite disintegration, cuts up all confederate governments by the root, and gives them over a prey to the caprices, and passions, and transient interests of their members, as autumnal leaves are given to the winds which blow upon them. In 1814, the Richmond Enquirer, then as now, the organ of public opinion in the South, pronounced secession to be treason, and nothing else, and such was then the doctrine of Southern statesmen. What was true then is equally true now. The prevalence of this pernicious heresy is mainly the fruit of that farce called “State rights,” which demagogues have been so long playing under tragic masks, and which has done more than all things else to unsettle the foundations of the republic, by estranging the people from the Federal Government, as one to be distrusted and resisted, instead of being, what it is, emphatically their own creation, at all times obedient to their will, and in its ministrations the grandest reflex of the

greatness and beneficence of popular power that has ever enabled the history of our race. Said Mr. Clay: "I owe a supreme allegiance to the General Government, and to my State a subordinate one." And this terse language disposes of the whole controversy which has arisen out of the secession movement in regard to the allegiance of the citizen. As the powers of the State and Federal Governments are in perfect harmony with each other, so there can be no conflict between the allegiance due to them; each, while acting within the sphere of its constitutional authority, is entitled to be obeyed; but when a State, throwing off all constitutional restraints, seeks to destroy the General Government, to say that its citizens are bound to follow it in this career of crime, and discard the supreme allegiance they owe to the government assailed, is one of the shallowest and most dangerous fallacies that has ever gained credence among men.

Kentucky, occupying a central position in the Union, is now protected from the scourge of foreign war, however much its ravages may waste the towns and cities upon our coasts or the commerce upon our seas; but, as a member of the Southern Confederacy, she would be a frontier State, and necessarily the victim of those border feuds and conflicts which have become proverbial in history alike for their fierceness and frequency. The people of the South now sleep quietly in their beds, while there is not a home in infatuated and misguided Virginia, that is not filled with the alarms and oppressed by the terrors of war. In the fate of this ancient Commonwealth—dragged to the altar of sacrifice by those who should have stood between her bosom and every foe—Kentucky may read her own. No wonder, therefore, that she has been so coaxingly besought to unite her fortunes with those of the South, and to lay down the bodies of her chivalric sons as a breast-work, behind which the Southern people may be sheltered. Even as attached to the Southern Confederacy she would be weak for all the purposes of self-protection as compared with her present position. But amid the mutations incident to such a helpless and self-disintegrating league, Kentucky would probably soon find herself adhering to a mere fragment of the Confederacy, or, it may be, standing entirely alone, in the presence of tiers of free States with populations exceeding by many millions her own. Feeble States, thus sepa-

rated from powerful and warlike neighborhoods by ideal boundaries, or by rivers as easily traversed as rivulets, are as insects that feed upon the lion's lip—liable at every moment to be crushed. The recorded doom of multitudes of such has left us a warning too solemn and impressive to be disregarded.

Kentucky now scarcely feels the contribution she makes to support the Government of the United States; but as a member of the Southern Confederacy, of whose policy free-trade will be a cardinal principle, she will be burdened with direct taxation to the amount of double, or it may be triple, or quadruple that which she now pays into her own treasury. Superadded to this will be required from her her share of those vast outlays necessary for the creation of a navy, the erection of forts and custom-houses along a frontier of several thousand miles, and for the maintenance of that large standing army which will be indispensable at once for her safety, and for imparting to the new government that strong military character which, it has been openly avowed, the peculiar institutions of the South will inexorably demand.

Kentucky now enjoys for her peculiar institution the protection of the Fugitive Slave Law, loyally enforced by the Government; and it is this law, effective in its power of recapture, but infinitely more potent in its moral agency in preventing the escape of slaves, that alone saves that institution in the Border States from utter extinction. She cannot carry this law with her into the new Confederacy. She will virtually have Canada brought to her doors in the form of Free States, whose population, relieved of all moral and constitutional obligations to deliver up fugitive slaves, will stand with open arms inviting and welcoming them, and defending them, if need be, at the point of the bayonet. Under such influences, slavery will perish rapidly away in Kentucky, as a ball of snow melts in a summer's sun.

Kentucky, in her soul, abhors the African slave-trade, and turns away with unspeakable loathing from the red altars of King Dahomey. But although this traffic has been temporarily interdicted by the seceded States, it is well understood that this step has been taken as a mere measure of policy for the purpose of impressing the Border States, and of conciliating the European powers. The ultimate legalization of this

trade, by a Republic professing to be based upon African servitude," must follow as certainly as does the conclusion from the premises of a mathematical proposition. Is Kentucky prepared to see the hand upon the dial plate of her civilization rudely thrust back a century, and to stand before the world the confessed champion of the African slave-hunter? Is she, with her unsullied fame, ready to become a pander to the rapacity of the African slave-trader, who burdens the very winds of the sea with the moans of the wretched captives whose limbs he has loaded with chains, and whose hearts he has broken? I do not, I cannot believe it.

For this catalogue of what Kentucky must suffer in abandoning her present honored and secure position, and becoming a member of the Southern Confederacy, what will be her indemnity? Nothing, absolutely nothing. The ill-woven ambition of some of her sons may possibly reach the Presidency of the new[Republic; that is all. Alas! alas! for that dream of the Presidency of a Southern Republic, which has disturbed so many pillows in the South, and perhaps some in the West also, and whose lurid light, like a demon's torch, is leading a nation to perdition.

The clamor, that in insisting upon the South to obey the laws, the great principle that all popular governments rest upon the consent of the governed, is violated, should not receive a moment's consideration. Popular government does, indeed, rest upon the consent of the governed, but it is upon the consent, *not of all, but of a majority of the governed*. Criminals are every day punished and made to obey the laws, certainly against their will, and no man supposes that the principle referred to is thereby invaded. A bill passed by a legislature, by the majority of a single vote only, though the constituents of all who voted against it should be in fact, as they are held to be in theory, opposed to its provisions, still is not the less operative as a law, and no right of self-government is thereby trampled upon. The clamor alluded to assumes that the States are separate and independent governments, and that laws enacted under the authority of all may be resisted and repealed at the pleasure of each. The people of the United States, so far as the powers of the General Government are concerned, are a unit, and laws passed by

a majority of all are binding upon all. The laws and Constitution, however, which the South now resists, have been adopted by her sanction, and the right she now claims is that of a feeble minority to repeal what a majority has adopted. Nothing could be more fallacious.

Civil war, under all circumstances, is a terrible calamity, and yet, from the selfish ambition and wickedness of men, the best governments have not been able to escape it. In regarding that which has been forced upon the Government of the United States, Kentucky should not look so much at the means which may be necessarily employed in its prosecution, as at the machinations by which this national tragedy has been brought upon us. When I look upon this land, a few months since so prosperous, so tranquil, and so free, and now behold it desolated by war, and the firesides of its thirty millions of people darkened, and their bosoms wrung with anguish, and know, as I do, that all this is the work of a score or two of men, who, over all this national ruin and despair, are preparing to carve with the sword their way to seats of permanent power, I cannot but think that they are accumulating upon their souls an amount of guilt hardly equalled in all the atrocities of treason and of homicide that have degraded the annals of our race from the foundations of the world. Kentucky may rest well assured that this conflict, which is one of self-defense, will be pursued on the part of the Government in the paternal spirit in which a father seeks to reclaim his erring offspring. No conquest, no effusion of blood is sought. In sorrow, not in anger, the prayer of all is, that the end may be reached without loss of life or waste of property. Among the most powerful instrumentalities relied on for re-establishing the authority of the Government, is that of the Union sentiment of the South, sustained by a liberal press. It is now trodden to the earth under a reign of terrorism which has no parallel but in the worst days of the French revolution. The presence of the Government will enable it to rebound and look its oppressors in the face. At present we are assured that in the seceded States no man expresses an opinion opposed to the revolution but at the hazard of his life and property. The only light which is admitted into political discussion is that which flashes from the sword or gleams from glistening bayonets. A few days since, one of the United States Senators from Virginia published a mani-

festo, in which he announces, with oracular solemnity and severity, that all citizens who would not vote for secession, but were in favor of the Union—not should or ought to—but “**MUST** leave the State.” These words have in them decidedly the crack of the overseer’s whip. The Senator evidently treats Virginia as a great negro quarter, in which the lash is the appropriate emblem of authority, and the only argument he will condescend to use. However the freemen of other parts of that State may abase themselves under the exercise of this insolent and proscriptive tyranny, should the Senator, with this scourge of slaves, endeavor to drive the people of Western Virginia from their homes, I will only say, in the language of the narrative of Gilpin’s ride:

“**May I be there to see.**”

It would certainly prove a deeply interesting spectacle.

It is true that before this deliverance of the popular mind of the South from the threatenings and alarm which have subdued it can be accomplished, the remorseless agitators who have made this revolution, and now hold its reins, must be discarded alike from the public confidence and the public service. The country in its agony is feeling their power, and we well understand how difficult will be the task of overthrowing the ascendancy they have secured. But the Union men of the South—believed to be in the majority in every seceded State, except, perhaps, South Carolina—aided by the presence of the Government, will be fully equal to the emergency. Let these agitators perish, politically, if need be, by scores;

“**A breath can make them as a breath has made**”

but destroy this Republic and—

“**Where is that Promethean heat,
That can its light relume?**”

Once entombed, when will the Angel of the Resurrection descend to the portals of its sepulchre? There is not a voice which comes to us from the cemetery of nations that does not answer: “Never, never!” Amid the torments of our perturbed existence, we may have glimpses of rest and of freedom, as the maniac has glimpses of reason between the paroxysms of his madness, but we shall attain to neither national dignity nor national repose. We shall be a mass of jarring, warring, fragmentary States, enfeebled and demoralized, without power at home, or respectability

abroad, and, like the republics of Mexico and South America, we will drift away on a shoreless and ensanguined sea of civil commotion, from which—if the teachings of history are to be trusted—we shall be finally rescued by the iron hand of some military wrecker, who will coin the shattered elements of our greatness and of our strength into a diadem and a throne. Said M. Fould, the great French statesman, to an American citizen, a few weeks since: "Your Republic is dead, and it is probably the last the world will ever see. You will have a reign of terrorism, and after that two or three monarchies." All this may be verified, should this revolution succeed.

Let us then twine each thread of the glorious tissue of our country's flag about our heart-strings, and looking upon our homes and catching the spirit that breathes upon us from the battle fields of our fathers, let us resolve that come weal or woe, we will in life and in death, now and forever, stand by the stars and stripes. They have floated over our cradles, let it be our prayer and our struggle that they shall float over our graves. They have been unfurled from the snows of Canada to the plains of New Orleans and to the halls of the Montezumas, and amid the solitudes of every sea ; and everywhere, as the luminous symbol of resistless and beneficent power, they have led the brave and the free to victory and to glory. It has been my fortune to look upon this flag in foreign lands and amid the gloom of an oriental despotism, and right well do I know, by contrast, how bright are its stars, and how sublime are its inspirations ! If this banner, the emblem for us of all that is grand in human history, and of all that is transporting in human hope, is to be sacrificed on the altars of a Satanic ambition, and thus disappear forever amid the night and tempests of revolution, then will I feel—and who shall estimate the desolation of that feeling ?—that the sun has indeed been stricken from the sky of our lives, and that henceforth we shall be wanderers and outcasts, with nought but the bread of sorrow and of penury for our lips, and with hands ever outstretched in feebleness and supplication, on which, in any hour, a military tyrant may rivet the fetters of a despairing bondage. May God in his infinite mercy save you and me, and the land we so much love, from the doom of such a degradation.

No contest so momentous as this has arisen in human history, for,

amid all the conflicts of men and of nations, the life of no such Government as ours has ever been at stake. Our fathers won our independence by the blood and sacrifices of a seven years' war, and we have maintained it against the assaults of the greatest power upon the earth ; and the question now is, whether we are to perish by our own hands, and have the epitaph of the suicide written upon our tomb. The ordeal through which we are passing must involve immense suffering and losses for us all, but the expenditure of not merely hundreds of millions but of billions of treasure will be well made, if the result shall be the preservation of our institutions.

Could my voice reach every dwelling in Kentucky, I would implore its inmates—if they would not have the rivers of their prosperity shrink away, as do unfed streams beneath the summer heats—to rouse themselves from their lethargy, and fly to the rescue of their country before it is everlastingly too late. Man should appeal to man, and neighborhood to neighborhood, until the electric fires of patriotism shall flash from heart to heart in one unbroken current throughout the land. It is a time in which the workshop, the office, the counting-house, and the field may well be abandoned for the solemn duty that is upon us, for all these toils will but bring treasure, not for ourselves, but for the spoiler, if this revolution is not arrested. We are all, with our every earthly interest, embarked in mid-ocean on the same common deck. The howl of the storm is in our ears, and “the lightning's red glare is painting hell on the sky,” and while the noble ship pitches and rolls under the lashings of the waves, the cry is heard that she has sprung a leak at many points, and that the rushing waters are mounting rapidly in the hold. The man who, in such an hour, will not work at the pumps, is either a maniac or a monster

Sincerely yours,

J. HOLT.

71.2009.084.09201

